

Three months ago we stood on this floor debating the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act (HR 9) in an effort to make sure elections are fair, that every vote is counted, and that people have equal access to the polls. Yet today we are faced with the Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006 (HR 4844) which would directly disenfranchise people of color, rural voters, young people, low-income people, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities.

At a time of decreased voter participation, it seems unwarranted to impose extraneous burdens on eligible citizens who want to participate in the democratic process. The identification requirements imposed by this legislation serve as a strong reminder of the poll taxes imposed by many Southern states in the 1950s to prevent poor and black Americans from voting.

According to the Department of Transportation, currently 6-12% of eligible voters do not have the proper identification mandated by this legislation. Acquiring the required documents places a huge time and financial burden on those least able to afford. For instance, a US passport costs approximately \$85, while replacing naturalization documents can cost up to \$210.

This legislation creates an outrageous burden on my state of Oregon. In 1998, Oregon voters passed an initiative requiring that all elections be conducted by mail. Should this bill pass, our voters would be required to photocopy their identification every time they wanted to vote which further hampers the accessibility to vote by mail. As for voter fraud, during the last 15 years of general elections over 10 million votes have been cast by Oregon voters and yet only ten people have met the criteria to warrant an investigation.

This legislation discourages voter participation, many who continue to lose confidence in our electoral system, while enabling voter discrimination in select communities. Overall, this legislation tries to create a solution to a voter fraud problem regarding voter identification that does not exist, while overlooking obvious and real problems.

Just last week during Maryland's primary elections many voters were delayed or turned away. In one county computer cards were not delivered to precinct workers while in another computers incorrectly read party affiliation and could not be tabulated.

Anyone who examined what happened in Ohio last election cycle, including voting problems and potential abuse due to the under funded and ill-thought out congressional meddling, must wonder what will happen in the 2008 election.

Every American should be alarmed and outraged by Congress indulging in partisan political shenanigans regarding elections rather than implementing long overdue protections for the integrity of the ballot box.